

Grace Episcopal Church
Scripture 202: Introduction to the Bible
Session 11: Pre-exilic Prophets
Wednesday, November 16, 2011

Announcement: This is the last session until January 4, 2012 where we will pick up our study about the Exile and the Prophets. Please attend the Advent class on Wednesday nights. Be thinking about your topic for your project. (Note the Syllabus)

Source:

Fant, et. al., Chapter 10, pp.185-204

Timeframe: 8th and 7th century BCE
Fall of Israel: Assyrians, 722 BCE
Fall of Judah: Babylonians, 587 BCE

These new prophets that came to the scene different from earlier in that their oracles were collected and preserved as individual literary works. Preserved that the messages would be vindicated in the future.

These writings contain prophetic oracles, editorial supplements, reinterpretation, and **the application of oracles to later situations.**

Spot them by the phrases:

Thus says YHWH
Hear the word of YHWH

Messages:

- Judgment
- Calls to repentance
- Messages of comfort
- Denunciations of violations of the covenant

Literary Forms:

- Laments
- Speeches
- Doxologies
- Hymns

Amos

Listed as a latter prophet in Hebrew canon
Listed as minor prophet in Christian canon

Structure of book of Amos

First Section

- 1:1 – 2:16 oracles against Israel and surrounding nations
- 2:4-5 oracle against Judah
- Third against Judah

Second Section

- 3:1-6:14 DOOM of the Northern Kingdom

Third Section

- 7:1 – 9:15 visions and close of Amos ministry.

Political Background:

Jeroboam 2 (786-746 BCE), Jeroboam restored territories, supported work of Jonah, reign was peaceful and victory over neighbors.

Economic Background:

Economic prosperity. Gap between rich and poor widen. Debate of Amos status: poor shepherd? Well to do cattle rancher? Corrupted judges favored the rich.

Religious Background:

Prospered. YHWH is with us.

Visions of Amos:

Reported to Jeroboam that Amos was forming opposition to his rule.
Never go back to Bethel.
Five visions in Chapters 7 & 8
-warned Israel with false sense of security.

Day of the Lord – term that first appears in Amos.

Hosea

Only prophet of the Northern Kingdom whose words are preserved in a separate book.

Career during last years of Jeroboam 2 (746 BC)

Structure of the Book

Two sections:

Chapters 1 – 3 = His marriage and its impact on his understanding of Israel's blight.

Chapters 4-14 = a series of prophetic speeches describing Israel unfaithfulness and judgment soon to come.

Background of Book

Similar to Amos but Hosea grew up during prosperity. Then the rapid loss of political stability following Jeroboam's death. Tough economy led to lack of compassion and moral stability.

Marriage and Call

Took on a wife of whoredom and had children of whoredom. Children =

1. Jezreel – reminder of the cruelty of the house of Jehu
2. Loruhamah – daughter meaning “not to be pitied”
3. Lo-ammi – Not my people.

Scandalous a prophet to marry her.

Message of the Book

1. Israel's infidelity to the covenant
2. Judgment and exile
3. Steadfast love of YHWH is heart of message and basis for hope in the future
4. Children of God will come from “not my people”
5. YHWH will heal their faithlessness and love them freely again.

Isaiah

740 – 701 BC – decline and annexed to Assyria. Israel in constant danger and came close to being destroyed by Assyria.

Sought to interpret events and the will of God for Israel at this time.

Three books in one:

1. Sometimes called 1 Isaiah = first 39 chapters
2. Deutero -Isaiah = 40 – 55
 - a. Chapters 1 – 12 = Is call, his listing sins of Judah and Jerusalem
 - b. Chapters 13-23 = Judgment against other nations
 - c. Chapters 24-27 = apocalypse of Isaiah
 - d. Chapters 28 – 33 = prophecies concerning Judah
 - e. Chapters 34 – 35 = future of Zion
 - f. Chapters 36- 39 = history of the Assyrian crisis.
3. Chapters 56-66 period following exile
4. Put together by Isaiah disciples at a later date.

Political Background

Assyria was dominant power. Deported many of the leaders of Israel in 722 BC.

Judah reached summit of power under Uzziah (783-742 BC)

Economic and Religious Background

Wealth concentrated in few hands. Rich guilty of oppression of widows and fatherless. Excesses of behavior. Religion was thriving but so was social injustice.

Call - Lived in Jerusalem and called to be a prophet in 742 BC

Ministry –

1. Dealt with major crisis of Ahaz kingship
2. Assyria in power, during reign of Hezekiah (713-711 BC)

Message –

1. Sovereignty of God as Holy One
2. Judgment from God because of Judah's rebellion
3. Israel trust in YHWH
4. His faith in the zion-David tradition. Protecting presence of God.

Micah

Appeared in Judah same time as Isaiah.

Book falls into 2 parts

1. Chapters 1 – 5
2. Chapters 6-7

Message

1. Announcing the fall of Jerusalem
 - a. Because of the exploitation of poor by rich and powerful
 - b. Indifference to claim of justice
 - c. Loss of integrity
 - d. Breakdown of family
2. Salvation
 - a. New ruler born in Bethlehem
 - b. Bring security to the people
3. God' requirement of moral and religious responsibility

Jeremiah

Longest of the prophetic books. Product of editing during the Exile and follows Deuteronomistic theology of covenant.

Believes in God's yearning for Israel's return from disobedience. Zion-Royal theology. Monarchy & Temple were indispensable. Ministry concluded 587 BC.

Political Background

Began during reign of King Josiah. Nation torn between Egypt and Babylonia. Instability.

Religious Background

1. One theology by survival of Jerusalem and that a line from King David would always rule. Zion Theology.
2. Deuteronomistic theology insisted on the chosen or election of Israel. Conditional on obedience of God.

Call

Called as a youth not from a priestly family. Parallels the experience of Moses.

Phases of Ministry

1. Described Judah's sin
 - a. Degeneracy, sensuality, double-mindedness
 - b. He was generally ignored in his early preaching.
2. Called for national repentance
 - a. His life was threaten
3. Warned of trouble from north
 - a. Pessimistic concerning the possibility of resistance to Babylon
 - b. Judah would serve Babylon
 - c. Zedekiah did not listen and attacked Babylon
 - i. Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, captured Zedekiah, Murdered his sons before his eyes, blinded him, and deported him Babylon.

Jeremiah's Message

1. Foe from the north would come and destroy Judah unless they changed their ways. There was hope if repentant
2. Judah should surrender to Babylon
3. Held out hope for Judah
4. Since all the oracles came true, he was accepted as a Mosaic prophet
5. Complaints of Jeremaih expressed frustration with enemies success, his own suffering, YHWH inaction.
6. Jeremiah thus became a symbol of endurance and fidelity during life's darkest hours.

Zephaniah

1st prophet after Isaiah and Micah following the dark days of the rule of Manasseh who promoted idolatry. Hard to date work.

Central message was that the fire of God's wrath is about to burn the whole created order. Z hoped that this message would provoke Judah to repent of their sins. Condemned idolatry, unethical actions, and loss of faith in God. The day of the Lord would be a day of judgment and is the ultimate source of judgment.

Nahum

Temple prophet in Jerusalem. 612 BC revolt pointed to the end of Nineveh. May have inspired Manasseh to revolt against Assyria. Focus of message was God's judgment on Assyria. Best poetry in Hebrew Scripture.

Habakkuk

Hard to date most likely during the fall of Assyrian and the beginning of Babylonian threats to Judah. Asked how God could allow such injustice and violence. Faith was the key, those not upright will eventually fall, fidelity will outlast injustice.